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Education in the Spiritan mission in Congo-Brazzaville: a historical-critical overview

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Translated
from the French

EDUCATION IN THE SPIRITAN MISSION IN CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE: A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In Congo-Brazzaville,¹ the terms “Spiritans” and “Education” seem contradictory. It is easier to associate Spiritan mission with parish animation, rather than with educational works. Furthermore, records on the missionary work of the Spiritans in the Congo often do not consider their contribution to education. They refer particularly to parish pastoral activities. Also, when the involvement of the Spiritans in education in the Congo is mentioned, this is done in a marginal way.² This state of affairs may suggest that the Spiritans are not interested or have not given a prominent place to education in their missionary adventure in the Congo.

This article sets out to question this observation and will build around two main points. On the one hand, it will be a question of examining the place of education in the Spiritan tradition from the texts of our general chapters (Itaïci, Maynooth and Bagamoyo, where the question of education arises clearly) and of our founders (Claude-François Poullart des Place and François Marie Paul Libermann). On the other hand, it will be a question of concretely analyzing the contribution of the Spiritans in terms of education in the specific context of the Congo.

EDUCATION IN THE SPIRITAN TRADITION

The preface to the *Spiritans Guide to Education*³ presents educa-

1. We've opted for the name “Congo-Brazzaville”, instead of the official name “Republic of Congo”, to avoid any confusion with the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. From now on, we'll simply write “Congo”.
2. See for example, G. Pannier, 1990, *L'Église de Pointe Noire. Évolution des communautés chrétiennes de 1947 à 1975* [The Church of Pointe Noire. Christian communities from 1947 to 1975], Paris : Karthala ; J. Ernoult, *Les Spiritans au Congo de 1865 à nos jours. Matériaux pour une histoire de l'Église au Congo* [The Spiritans in the Congo from 1865 to the present day. Materials for a history of the Church in the Congo], Paris : Congrégation du Saint Esprit, 1995.
3. This very document is one of the main sources of inspiration for this section of our contribution.

Education has been, since the founding of the congregation, part of the Spiritan mission of evangelization.

Spiritans see education as a means of liberation from all forms of social, cultural, and intellectual oppression.

tion as an existential⁴ and original aspect of the Spiritan charism and mission. According to this document, education has been, since the founding of the congregation, part of the Spiritan mission of evangelization.⁵ Spiritan educational works are characterized therein as a “general” Spiritan “strategy” of evangelization, the essential aim of which is to give the human being the possibility of growth through spiritual, human, intellectual, physical, and cultural development.⁶

Recent General Chapters of the Congregation also emphasize the importance of education in the Spiritan mission. GC XVII, the general chapter of Itaici (1992), affirmed that education is an essential dimension of the Spiritan charism. Its main purpose is to open “the doors of a decent human life, while (...) showing the preferential love of the Lord for the most disadvantaged.” Moreover, this chapter defined education as a tool for the liberation and emancipation of the poor (Itaici, 14). In the same way, GC XVIII, the chapter of Maynooth (1998), underlined that for the Spiritans, the vocation of education is to favor the blooming of talents among the poor in order to enable them to engage in society in a resolute and responsible way (Maynooth, 2.13 – 2.16).⁷ GC XX, the Bagamoyo I chapter (2012), followed in the footsteps of previous chapters in recognizing and affirming the place and role of education in the congregation. In doing so, this chapter of Bagamoyo called on all Spiritans to commit themselves resolutely to educational works (Bagamoyo I. 1.28 – 1.30).

Thus, for the Spiritans, education is not only essential, but it is also a fundamental tool by which they reach poor and marginalized people, without any distinction of race, sex, tribe, language, people, or nation. Spiritans see education as a means of liberation from all forms of social, cultural, and intellectual oppression. It is for this reason that the universality of rights and duties is an indispensable aspect in their commitments to education. This special attention that the congregation gives to education is rooted in the life and work of its founders, Claude-François Poullart des Places (Feb. 26, 1679 – Oct. 2, 1709)

4. We borrow this term from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In his work on ontology—the fundamental metaphysics, he uses this concept to designate the way in which the existing subject (man) experiences, assumes, orients and directs his or her existence. In other words, the existential refers to the way of life, the project of life or lifestyle of an existing subject. In the context of this article, we use this term to refer to the mode of being (or form-of-life) and the missionary project of the Spiritans.

5. *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation* [Guide for Spiritan Formation] 2016, 2.

6. *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation*, 3 and 11.

7. For more details, *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation*, no. 1.3

and François Marie Paul Libermann (April 14, 1802 – Feb. 2, 1852).

Intended for the profession of lawyer, the young Poullart des Places had to give up this dream forged by his parents. While still a theology student, he devoted himself to taking charge of the formation of seminarians who lacked the means to pay for their studies.⁸ His main purpose was to provide them with adequate education and training in order to make them “effective,” “humble and devoted” ministers of the Gospel to the disadvantaged and abandoned of their time.⁹ This is how he was led to create a seminary, where a community of poor students would live.¹⁰ Following Poullart’s death in 1709, just two years after his priestly ordination, this work was continued by his successors. Their tasks consisted, among other things, of supervising the subjects dealt with in their classes.¹¹

Thus, in the 1730s, after the congregation and the seminary had received their official approval from the Archdiocese of Paris and the State, Father Louis Bouic, then superior general of the congregation since 1710, formulated, as Henri le Floch reports, the purpose of the seminary: “to educate the poor clergy with zeal for ecclesiastical discipline and the love of the virtues, particularly those of obedience and poverty.”¹² During his lifetime, Poullart had himself specified the conditions of admission. The candidate had to meet the following criteria: be poor enough and unable to pay his school pension, be of good moral character, and intelligent enough to pursue higher education. Also, the candidate had to pass a written and oral test. The selection favored promising students, who demonstrated an intellectual disposition capable of adapting to the educational demands of the new seminary.¹³ In the second article, dealing with “the study of Holy Scripture, philoso-

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pay his school
pension, be of
good moral
character, and
intelligent
enough to
pursue higher
education.*

8. H. J. Koren, CSSp, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, Bethel Park, PA: Spiritus Press, 1990, 111 – 12; *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation*, 3.

9. *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation*, n° 1.1, 7.

10. H.J. Koren, 1900, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, 111 – 12

11. H.J. Koren, 1990, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, 112 ; Henry J. Koren & Jean Ernoult, 2003, “Les Spiritains, l’enseignement et les œuvres éducatives. Quelques aperçus de 1703 à 1982 [Spiritans, teaching and educational works. An overview from 1703 to 1982]”, in *Mémoire Spiritaine*, n° 17, Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, Paris: Saints-Geosmes, 101 – 126.

12. Le Floch, Henri, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, Paris: Karthala, 1915.

13. Koren, 113. To illustrate the strict nature of these measures, Koren states that Father Bouic required François Pottier, then Bishop of Sichuan in China, to repeat his philosophy course, as his level was deemed insufficient to enter the Seminary of the Holy Spirit.

phy and theology,” of the second chapter, “of the different duties and obligations common to all individuals,” Poullart des Places himself describes what he meant by educating students in his new community. It pays particular attention to intellectual asceticism, training in discipline and rigor in learning and respecting the hours of study that it sets as necessary conditions for success.¹⁴

Libermann quickly realized the importance of education for mission.

While Poullart des Places was, from the beginning of his work, very committed to education, Libermann for his part had a rather mixed position. A converted Jew who became a priest after long years of waiting due to illness, he was initially very reluctant towards the education and intellectual formation of the members of his institute, the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, founded in 1840 and which in 1848 was absorbed into the congregation of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit founded by Poullart des Places in 1703.¹⁵ He gave priority to the construction of parishes over education. Thus, in his *Provisional Rule* which he wrote in Rome in 1840, he wrote that even if his missionaries should form a native clergy by creating minor seminaries in their mission country, they should however never “take it upon themselves to teach them the letters.”¹⁶ But four years later, Libermann quickly realized the importance of education for mission. One of the main factors in this change of position was the need to train indigenous clergy competent for the evangelization of their brothers and sisters. Thus, in March 1844, he addressed Mr. Frédéric Le Vavas seur in these terms: “... the rule says that we must not take charge of the instruction of youth. The circumstances show that, probably, we will be obliged to take care of it.”¹⁷ Thus, as Koren and Ernoult point out, Libermann,

... considered that civilization was impossible without

14. C. de Mare, 1998, *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain: Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709), Écrits et Études* [At the roots of the Spiritan tree: Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709), Writings and Studies], Coll. *Mémoire Spiritaine*. Études et Documents, n°4, Paris, Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 342.

15. For an overview of the history of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit Under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, see, among others, Paul Coulon, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains. De la fondation en 1703 à la restauration par Libermann en 1848. La congrégation du Saint-Esprit dans son histoire I*. Paris: Karthala, 2009.

16. Libermann, *Règle provisoire*, Chapitre III : Quelle est la destination de la Congrégation ? Art. 1^{er} [Provisional Rule, Chapter III: What is the purpose of the Congregation? Art. 1], *Notes et Documents* (ND), II, 240.

17. Libermann, ND, VI, 121. For more details on Libermann's commitment to education, cf., Koren, 129 – 139.

faith. From there, it is the missionary's task, it is his whole duty to work at it, not only in the moral part, but also in the intellectual and physical part, that is to say in instruction, agriculture and trades.¹⁸

From the foregoing, it should be noted that for Poullart des Places, and later for Libermann, education was understood as an intellectual formation whose main aim was to give future members of the clergy the necessary intellectual skills that would enable them to meet the challenges of the times. Education was about capacity building and human empowerment, as well as training in rhetoric; in other words, the art of persuasion and preaching. To this end, Poullart wrote in his general regulations, number 49, "all individuals will be obliged, each in turn and according to whether he is appointed for this, to speak publicly in the house for an hour and a half each week."¹⁹ Thus any educational work in which the Spiritan engages must above all favor the poor, that is to say those who lack the means to meet their needs of education. In other words, a Spiritan work which is built on the margins of this founding principle is constituted in contradiction to the founding intuitions and to the charism of the congregation as it is expressed in the *Spiritan Rule of Life*, 4: evangelization of the poor is our mission.²⁰ Evangelism, that is to say, the good and liberating character of this preferential option in the Spiritan educational mission, is dependent on the fact that it aims to lead the human being out of all forms of obscurantism.

Any educational work in which the Spiritan engages must above all favor the poor.

Furthermore, education for Spiritans must support the intellectual formation and the need for the empowerment of people. The latter must free people from anything that can alienate not only their intelligence, but also their openness to the particular and the universal. All this happens and is realized through a qualified educational training. It is in this spirit that the *Guide for Spiritan Formation* posits academic excellence as one of the Spiritan values in education.

Spiritan educational works seek to promote academic excellence through teaching and instruction, both inside and outside the classroom. Students are helped to acquire knowledge, understanding, skills and behaviors commensurate with their life experience. We seek to motivate them by setting goals and encouraging everyone to strive

18. H. J. Koren et J. Ernoult, 2003, "Les Spiritains, l'enseignement et les œuvres éducatives. Quelques aperçus de 1703 à 1982 [Spiritans, teaching and educational works. Some insights from 1703 to 1982]," 115.

19. *Ibidem*, 343.

20. *Guide spiritain pour l'éducation* [Guide for Spiritan Formation], 2.1.

for excellence according to their possibilities, which gives a broad educational experience and helps people find their way in life.²¹

Finally, Poullart des Places and, especially Libermann, saw education as holistic formation. The challenge of the latter is to make people acquire independence and emancipation from what oppresses them, first and foremost mental, intellectual and spiritual poverty. This is why Libermann insisted, as we quoted above, on the fact that education should support intellectual and physical training as well as the acquisition of skills for a particular trade.

SPIRITAN EDUCATIONAL WORKS IN THE CONGO

From the very beginning of their arrival in the Congo in the nineteenth century,²² the Spiritans were committed to the front line of education. Studies on the history of the evangelization of the Congo do not fail to mention the involvement of the Spiritans in education. While our primary interest in this work is to shed light on Spiritan participation in education in the Congo in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a brief historical overview will help to contextualize the particular character of education in the Congo in the Spiritan tradition. Since 1883, education has been at the heart of the Spiritan mission in the Congo. The Spiritans had already by that time built and set up schools. Admittedly, the latter could be described as embryonic and that they were above all for religious education, it remains no less true that they were constituted as literacy centers. At that time, official schools were non-existent; the latter dating from 1911.²³ Two examples show how teaching and education have always been constitutive aspects of the Spiritan mission in Congo Brazzaville.²⁴ In 1883, for example, Father Carrie and Brother

21. *Ibid.*, 2.6.

22. The Spiritan Fathers officially arrived in the Congo in 1865. For more on this subject, see J. Ernout, *Les Spiritains au Congo de 1865 à nos jours, 1995* [Spiritans in the Congo from 1865 to the present day, 1995], 11 – 13.

23. 3G. Pannier, *L'Église du Loango 1919 – 1947 au Congo-Brazzaville une étape difficile de l'évangélisation* [The Church of Loango 1919 - 1947 in Congo-Brazzaville: a difficult stage in evangelization], Paris : Karthala, 2008, 178. See also, C. E. Kiamba, *Construction de l'Etat et Politiques de l'Enseignement au Congo-Brazzaville, de 1911 à 1997, Une Contribution à l'analyse de l'Action publique en Afrique noire* [State Construction and Education Policies in Congo-Brazzaville, from 1911 to 1997, A Contribution to the Analysis of Public Action in Black Africa], Histoire, Philosophie et Sociologie des sciences. Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux, Bordeaux : Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux, 2007, IV, 32 – 44.

24. There are many more examples that could be mentioned. But for reasons relating to the size of the article, we'll limit ourselves to mentioning just two or three at most. For more details, see, G. Pannier, 178 – 206 ; C. E. Kiamba,

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Kehren, both Spiritan missionaries, set up in Loango an embryonic and “episodic school represented by a dwelling house, the ground floor of which served” as a place of instruction.²⁵ The instruction focused on learning to read and write, as well as familiarization with French. Faithful to the intuitions of the founders, the preferential option for the poor and the right for all to education were the priority. “The children enrolled in this school were for the majority children of peasants recruited from different families and fully supported by Spiritan missionaries.”²⁶

IN 1885, FR. AUGOUARD BEGAN CONSTRUCTING HOUSES THAT WERE TO SERVE AS A SCHOOL IN LINZOLO.

On his return, in January 1885, Fr. Augouard brought with him additional personnel. The Linzolo community then consisted of three fathers and two brothers.

Fr. Victor Paris is in charge of the ministry, Fr. Kraft is bursar, gives classes and catechism, Br. Savinien and Br. Philomène Hirsch combine the functions of supervisors of children, farmers, horticulturists, tailors, shoemakers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths (...) As for Fr. Augouard, he is busy with construction. A house 35 m long by 5 m wide will soon rise, comprising five bedrooms, a refectory, and a workshop; a school of 13 m by 5 m, with a gallery all around.²⁷

Thanks to this construction, the Linzolo village had a double character. At the same time, it became a center for the propagation of the Christian faith in the Pool region and a point of reference for the westernization of Congolese values and the teaching of French civilization.²⁸ A text written by Father Carrie, who became Bishop Carrie, in 1896 gives an account of this.

The multiplication of schools is of the greatest importance. Without them, French and Christian civilization will never penetrate the vast expanse of the Congo... We need schools to recruit all the personnel we need: priests, religious, cat-

25 – 32.

25. J. Ernoult, 48; C. E. Kiamba, 25.

26. *Ibidem*, 26.

27. J. Ernoult, 64.

28. C.E., Kiamba, 27.

echists, teachers, etc. We need schools for the rapid and solid propagation of Christian teaching...We need schools to save souls.²⁹

The Spiritans in Congo in agreement with the competent authorities, have, in spite of the financial cost that it requires, decided to rehabilitate the school.

The Spiritans' interest in schools and education has never changed. It continued until after the establishment of official schools from 1911.³⁰ In the public domain as well as in the private domain, especially in the Church, the Spiritans were key players in the field of education. The public domain, for example, in 1944-1945, Father Charles Lecomte, a Spiritan missionary, founded at the current address, 184 rue Djambala in the arrondissement 5, Ouenzé, the school Saint-Michel, known under the name *Mikate e pola*.³¹ Its primary vocation was to serve as a center for vocational animation and education for the youth of the said district. The teachings were provided by the Spiritans themselves and by certain lay teachers. But, in the wake of the nationalization of schools in 1965, this school had become the property of the Congolese state and was named as a primary school of the Revolution.

With the handover of the schools from the years 1991 – 92, the Spiritans were reluctant to take responsibility for this establishment, considering it a “heavy burden for the congregation.” Having deteriorated, it had become a habitat for bandits. “Contrary to the project of the public authorities which recommended installing an advanced police station on the spot because of the insecurity in the area, the Spiritans in Congo in agreement with the competent authorities, have, in spite of the financial cost that it requires, decided to rehabilitate the school”³² and to reopen its doors for the education and instruction of the children of the district. It rediscovered an aspect of its original vocation in accordance with the educational system of the nation. At the time of the takeover of the said school, Fr. Toussaint Ngoma and his council renamed the school “*École Père-Paul-Ondia*” in honor of:

... the first Congolese Spiritan who, during his lifetime, was distinguished by his passion as a teacher and trainer in the various educational structures and formation houses in which he worked.³³

29. J. Ernout, 296.

30. On the process of formalizing teaching and education in the Congo, see C. E., Kiamba, 33 - 50; G. Pannier, 17 - 90.

31. J. Ernout, 329.

32. *Ibidem*.

33. Association des Spiritains au Congo, 2022, « Lettre de demande de l'autorisation canonique » [Association of the Spiritans in the Congo, 2022, “Letter

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fected by
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In 1954, Father Roger Vallée, director of Catholic education, built a pilot school in Mongali (now Moungali) called School of the Holy Spirit. Like the Saint-Michel school, this pilot school was also nationalized and was called “The School of Peace”. But in accordance with the government decree relating to the repossession of nationalized Catholic schools in 1965, the school was returned to the Church in 2003. While M^{gr} Anatole Milandou was Archbishop of Brazzaville, the Church entrusted the school to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, of which the missionaries were the founders. In 2019, when Father Toussaint Ngoma was Superior of the Spiritans in Congo, the school was renamed “Fr. Libermann School”, for his passion for the emancipation of the local people. It should also be noted that the Spiritans today own other educational works, such as “Saint-Kizito School”, located in District 1, Makélékélé. There is also the Jarrot space; created in 1998 and located in the south of Brazzaville in the Bacongo district. The Centre, *Espace-Jarrot*, was primarily intended to welcome and support children particularly affected by the 1997/98 civil war. In 2001, the center extended its operation with the construction of a space for the accommodation, support, education, and reintegration of children in precarious situations, known as street children.³⁴

At the ecclesial level, the Spiritans have contributed especially to the education and training of the local clergy. To do this, they founded seminaries. Thus, already in 1907, Bishop Carrie could write: “we also have a major and a minor seminary for the formation of native clergy, as well as three novitiates of native brothers and sisters.”³⁵

In October 1961, under the direction of Father Jacques Du-bourg, the Spiritans opened a new minor seminary in Loango. It is interesting to recall that this seminary had been established before in Landana in 1873, where many members of the local diocesan clergy of the Congo and many executives of the Congo, studied.

In 1947, the Spiritans created the major regional seminary of Brazzaville and named it in honor of Fr. Libermann. From a historical and ecclesial point of view, the foundation of this seminary responded to the need to have a center for the training of the Congolese clergy. Prior to this period, seminarians were sent to various seminaries in

requesting canonical authorization”].

34. Association des Spiritains au Congo, « Statuts et règlements intérieur annexe de l’Espace Père-Jarrot » [Association of the Spiritans in the Congo, “By-laws and internal annex regulations of the *Espace Père-Jarrot*”].

35. J. Ernoult, 52.

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and Philippe
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the apostolic vicariates of French Equatorial Africa (the AEF), notably to the Saint-Jean Seminary in Libreville, Gabon, which served as an inter-vicarial seminary for Loango and Brazzaville and to the major seminary of Mvolyé in Cameroon.³⁶ The mission of creating the Liebermann major seminary in Brazzaville was entrusted to Spiritan priests, Émile Laurent, who was its first director, and to Lucien Deiss, Joseph Hirtz, and Philippe David who were professors. The place and role of this institution not only in the training of the local Congolese clergy, but also in education cannot be challenged. From its beginning, the seminary has constituted itself as a place of education and advanced philosophical and theological studies in the Congo.

It was in March 1977 that the seminary was re-named the Seminary Emile Biayenda,³⁷ in homage to this great clergyman of the Congo who gave his life as a martyr for the peace and unity of his country. Until that time, the Spiritans were teachers and trainers of the said seminary. They began to give way to the diocesan clergy in 1982 with the appointment of Father Louis Portella (bishop emeritus of the diocese of Kinkala) as professor of philosophy and, the following year, as rector of the seminary succeeding Fr. Christian de Mare. It was in 1986 that the Spiritans definitively left the major seminary. However, it should be noted so far, some Spiritan priests continue to make their contribution to the formation of diocesan clergy. Thus, currently Fr. Jonas Bangui, parish priest of Notre Dame des Victoires (Mama Elombe, in Lingala, a local language of Congo) teaches patrology there. Before him, Fr. Alain Mayama taught the Magisterium and Philosophy course, and Fr. Yves Isidore Nzoussi taught moral theology.

FOR A NEW AND INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL DYNAMIC

This exposition of historical data shows how the commitment to education is constitutive of the Spiritan identity and mission. The Spiritans played an important role in education in the Congo. They not only laid the groundwork and built schools, but they were also very committed actors in education. The question arises, however, of the timeliness of the Spiritan commitment to education. The Spiritans are certainly the owners of these educational works, it should however be noted that they do not participate directly in teaching. Their commitment concerns the coordination and direction of the schools they own and for which they are responsible. Through these functions of an administrative nature, they keep alive the memory of their founding fathers. Also, they express

36. *Ibidem*, 326.

37. *Ibidem*, 329.

In a country like the Congo where the quality of education is becoming an urgent issue, the Spiritan presence in education, at least in their schools, is more than a necessity.

the passion of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit for education. But should we stop there? In other words, should the commitment of the Congolese Spiritans for education today be limited only to the coordination and direction of schools? What impact will they have on the intellectual, human, religious and moral formation of students by giving priority to administrative tasks? In a country like the Congo where the quality of education is becoming an urgent issue, the Spiritan presence in education, at least in their schools, is more than a necessity for at least two reasons.

First, through this involvement, the Spiritans will continue to be part of the history of the congregation. This will then be a mark of fidelity to the educational tradition of the congregation. Then, by engaging in teaching, the Spiritans will contribute significantly to the formation and intellectual and human emancipation of Congolese youth. This requires trained and qualified personnel. However, in the current state, in the Congo, the Spiritans do not have confreres specifically trained for education and teaching in the schools under their responsibility. To overcome this lack, the provincial administration must certainly consider training Spiritan personnel so that the commitment to education is not limited solely to administrative activities. Certainly, the commitment of lay people to provide education in Spiritan schools responds to the needs of synodality and co-responsibility between clerics and lay people in the Church. The holding of classes by Spiritans will be an effective means of contributing to the advent of a new Congolese society. The Spiritan educators will not only teach academic disciplines, but they will also impact the lives of students from a moral point of view. In this way the congregation's contribution in the field of education in the Congo will be more relevant and visible.

Second, the question arises of the purpose of Spiritan educational works. Since the 1990s, there has been a whole host of private schools in the Congo. Most of the latter are more dedicated to general education. Spiritan schools are no exception. The purpose of Spiritan educational works could come from the interest in technical or vocational education. Indeed, at the secondary level, the Spiritans will be able to particularly privilege the fields of formation less exploited in the Congo. To do this, we can re-exploit and revalorize the founding idea of sala-ngolo (which means, "make an effort," in the Kituba language of Congo). Located in Dolisie in the southern part of the Congo, Sala-ngolo is a Spiritan Center for vocational training. Originally, this center had a dual purpose. On the one hand, to train young mothers in a trade (pastry cook, seamstress, cook, etc.) to make them autonomous and re-

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sponsible for their lives. On the other hand, helping young people who have not been able to continue their studies, due to certain existential circumstances (poverty, parents' refusal to pay for their studies, the sudden death of those who could help them, etc.) to learn a trade (masonry, plumbing, carpentry, etc.) in order to support themselves. This professionalization of training/education could promote job creation, individual empowerment, and youth development. Finally, with globalization (compression of space and time), knowledge and mastery of foreign languages, such as English, Spanish, Italian, etc., is an asset for the youth of the future. Language learning breaks down borders; and opens up enormous possibilities for all. Creating an official and serious language school, for example, may be a *sui generis* Spiritian initiative. However, the possibility of associating other religious congregations with such an initiative cannot be ruled out. We can also think of the creation of a vocational training school in agriculture. All of this will contribute in the long term to realizing a Spiritian missionary intuition since the founding of the Congregation: the empowerment and emancipation of the whole person.

CONCLUSION

*How to
perpetuate
and make
more
innovative
this Spiritian
commitment
to education?*

We have endeavored to show the relationship between Spiritian mission and the commitment to education in the Congo. What we have presented is a historical and critical overview of Spiritian educational works in a continuity between the past and the present. So far be it from us to claim to have presented an exhaustive work on this subject. It was only a question of highlighting an important, but little-known aspect of the evangelization mission of the Spiritians in the Congo. The current challenge, however, is how to perpetuate and make more innovative this Spiritian commitment to education. The task is all the more significant as it requires fundamental reflection in close relation to the social, economic and political conditions in force in the country. We remain convinced that the Spiritians have a significant role to play in the emancipation and improvement of the intellectual life of the Congo.

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